Dear editor,

We enclose a manuscript titled “The emergence of words from vocal imitations.” The reported experiments (involving nearly 1600 participants) examine the process by which spoken words can emerge from imitations of environmental sounds. We show how a simple process of unguided imitation results in vocal imitations transitioning to word-like forms. In the course of this transition, the vocal forms become more stable, repeatable, and more learnable as category labels. Remarkably, even after as many as 8 generations of participants, the forms still maintain resemblance to the sounds that motivated them such that naïve participants can guess the meaning of these “words” at levels considerably above change.

We believe this manuscript is suitable for *PNAS* for several reasons. First, the topic is of broad appeal, bridging between linguistics, cognitive psychology, and semiotics. Second, our study is innovative, providing the first look at the emergence of categorical spoken labels from simple imitations. Third, more than simply detailing a set of results, this work introduces a novel method (complete with the requisite analyses and software) enabling others to conduct similar experiments to generalize beyond the set of meanings we tested.

We are strongly committed to openness and reproducibility. We are making available all of our data, analyses, and software available in online repositories so that others can easily reproduce and extend our results. Links to software repositories and details for reproduction are provided in the Supporting Information.

We thank you for your consideration of this manuscript.

Pierce Edmiston, Marcus Perlman, and Gary Lupyan